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ABSTRACT

This evaluation was conducted to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Psychological Services Program in the Dade County Public Schools, Florida. The program provides psychological evaluations for students under consideration for special education. This includes students with emotional, mental, and/or physical handicaps and gifted students. Special emphasis was put on the continuing backlog of students waiting for psychological evaluation and the delays in the process. The specific topics studied were: the level of needs for program services; the duties and activities of school psychologists; the productivity of the program; the level of false-positive evaluation; the supervision of school psychologist; and standards of quality in the psychological evaluations. Questionnaires were used to collect the necessary data from school psychologists and principals. A random sample of 100 cases was analyzed for descriptive information, and the psychological services models used by other major public school systems were investigated by telephone surveys. Results showed that the level of need for the program overwhelmed the existing staff of school psychologists; and that more school psychologists should be hired. It was also found that certain components of the psychological evaluation process were not operating at optimal efficiency. The study recommended several changes to the program in order to meet the needs of the district. Appendices include a copy of the school psychologist questionnaire) and the interview form of the telephone survey of other schools. (JAZ)

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DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EVALUATION OF THE

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES PROGRAM

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EVALUATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES PROGRAM

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January 1986

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Psychological Services Program provides, for the most part, psychological evaluations for students being considered for special education programs. Included in this group are students with emotional, mental and/or physical handicaps, as well as gifted students. Eligibility for special education programs is determined by the results of a formal psychological evaluation which is performed by a school psychologist.

The evaluation of the Psychological Services Program focused primarily on the continuing backlog of cases awaiting psychological evaluations, as well as the delays that are common in the psychological evaluation process. It should be noted that, in this report, the psychological evaluation process is defined as all procedural steps required in order to identify and staff students in special education programs. The basic steps include referral, psychological evaluation/testing and staffing. Although the primary responsibility of the school psychologist concerns the psychological evaluation/testing step, he essentially participates in every step of the process. Therefore, the scope of the evaluation encompassed the entire process. The specific topics addressed were the following: the level of need for program services, the school psychologist's duties and activities, the productivity of the program, the level of false-positive evaluations, the supervision of the school psychologists, and the standards for quality in the psychological evaluations. Data were collected from school psychologists and principals via questionnaires developed specifically for this evaluation. In addition, a random sample of 100 cases was analyzed for descriptive information on the type of evaluation requested and the time involved in completing the major steps of the process. Finally, the psychological services models used by other major public school systems were investigated by means of a telephone survey.

The results of the study included estimates of the magnitude of the backlog during April of 1985. These estimates revealed that there were at least 3,400 students awaiting psychological evaluations. This represents a sizable level of need, for it would take the current staff of school psychologists at least 3 1/2 months to process all these cases while ignoring new referrals. The school psychologists' level of productivity, however, is not deficient. The study noted that it is comparable to other large school systems. Thus, it must be concluded that the district's level of need has overwhelmed the existing staff of school psychologists. To remedy this problem, it will be necessary to increase the staff of school psychologists. Determining the exact number of new psychologists needed, however, is difficult, since there is some evidence that certain components of the psychological evaluation process are not operating at optimal efficiency. The correction of this situation would minimize the number of new psychologists needed. For example, the review of the 100 cases revealed that approximately 67% did not result in placement due to ineligibility. If the screening for gifted referrals could be improved so that the 67% "false-positive" rate recedes, it would subsequently reduce the number of cases in the backlog and minimize the number of new psychologists needed.

Consequently, the study recommended several changes to the program in order to better meet the needs of the district. These recommendations include:

1) Revise the information system for the program on a districtwide basis to include both case information (e.g., type of psychological evaluation requested) and program information (e.g., number of referrals received).

2) Review the psychological evaluation process from the initial Child Study Team (CST) meeting to the staffing at the Multidisciplinary Team (M-Team) meeting in order to identify and improve the components in the process that may not be operating at optimal efficiency.

3) Consider the feasibility of diversifying the school psycholgist's duties and activities beyond the present testing and related duties.

4) Continue the process of establishing standards of quality for psychological evaluations.

5) Provide technical supervision in addition to the administrative supervision the school psychologists presently receive.

6) Consider temporary measures to reduce the current backlog of psychological evaluations.

7) Expand the existing staff of school psychologists based on a conservative estimate of the immediate need; however, further staffing needs should be based on a review of the effectiveness of the efforts to optimize the efficiency of the entire process (in compliance with recommendation #2).

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Purpose

The Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program is charged with the responsibility to provide appropriate educational programs and related services for students with special needs (P.L. 94-142). Included in this group of students are those with mental, emotional and/or physical handicaps, as well as students in gifted programs. All special education students must first undergo a formal psychological evaluation to determine eligibility according to established criteria. The procedures by which a student is evaluated and placed are complex. There are many features built into the psychological evaluation process which are designed to ensure a comprehensive review of all pertinent student information, un-biased test results, and placement in the least restrictive environment. Finally, it should be noted that in this report the term "psychological evaluation process" adheres to the following operational definition: The psychological evaluation process refers to all the procedural steps between and including the initial referral and the final staffing of a special education student.[1]

The Psychological Evaluation Process

The typical psychological evaluation process begins at the student's school. A classroom teacher may refer a student who is experiencing learning and/or behavioral problems to the school's Child Study Team (CST). According to program documents, the CST's primary function "is to devise educational strategies for students with problems which utilize all resources at the (school) level before referrals are made for the formalized (psychological) evaluation process". The CST includes representatives of the school administration, teachers, counselors and a school psychologist; other personnel (e.g., speech pathologists) are included as needed. The specific composition of the team is determined by the principal. During the initial meeting of the CST, information on the student is presented so that the problem is defined; and, suggestions for school-based interventions are made. In a subsequent meeting of the CST, the intervention alternatives are evaluated and, if indicated, the student is referred to the area ESE office for a formal psychological evaluation. Before a referral can be made, however, reports and other pertinent documentation are collected. The student may need a hearing or vision evaluation. The student with emotional and/or behavioral problems will require the teacher to maintain anecdotal records. All referrals are required to have a social history completed by the visiting teacher; and, written parental permission for a psychological evaluation is required.

At the area ESE office the referral is given a number and logged. A file is started and the case is assigned to a school psychologist. The school psychologist reviews the file and determines which tests are appropriate for the psychological evaluation of the student. The school psychologist subsequently conducts the psychological evaluation and prepares a report of the findings. The typing of the report is done at the area ESE office by word processors.

[1]It should be acknowledged that the term "psychological evaluation process" is used in the program documents to refer to only the procedural steps directly associated with the testing of the student. There is no single term commonly used in these documents which encompasses all the procedural steps from the initial referral to the final staffing. Consequently, an operational definition was warranted to facilitate communication.

Once the report is reviewed for errors and signed by the school psychologist, the case is referred to a placement specialist for a Multidisciplinary Team (M-Team) staffing. The M-Team, with the parent's consent, assumes the decision-making responsibility for the student's educational program. The multidisciplinary nature of the entire process ensures a comprehensive and accurate review of the student's strengths, weaknesses and needs.

The case described above concerns an initial psychological evaluation. This, however, is not the only psychological evaluation required. All current special education students are required to be reevaluated every three years to determine if their educational program meets their current needs. The only special education students exempt from reevaluation are gifted students.

It should be noted that the school psychologist participates in the entire psychological evaluation process. Prior to the referral to the area ESE office for a formal psychological evaluation, the school psychologist shares in the responsibility for recommending school-based strategies along with the other members of the school's CST. Once the student is referred to the area ESE office and the case is opened, the school psychologist assumes the responsibility for testing the student and writing a report of his findings. At that point the case is referred to the placement specialist. It is the placement specialist's responsibility to arrange for the staffing at the M-Team meeting. At the staffing the school psychologist once again shares the responsibility with the other members of the M-Team in making recommendations for placement in an appropriate program. Thus, the school psychologist participates in the entire psychological evaluation process.

Program Personnel

The Psychological Services staff includes 74 school psychologists who have at least a master's degree in psychology. According to program documents, the major duties of a school psychologist are as follows:

1. Administers appropriate tests to students

2. Examines all other evidence as it relates to the evaluation of the student

3. Serves as a member of the CST and the M-Team

4. Completes and submits M-Team reports to the Area ESE Office Director

5. Works with Placement Specialists and other school personnel

6. "Attends to eight assigned cases per week, inclusive of 4 or more of the following functions:

   ...psychological review
   ...initial evaluation
   ...reevaluation
   ...staffing and placement conference
   ...student observations
   ...teacher conferences
   ...Child Study Team conference".

Each school psychologist is assigned to one of the four area ESE offices. Twenty are assigned to the North Area and 18 to each of the other three area ESE offices.[2] A chairperson is designated for each area. The position of chairperson is not full-time; the chairperson maintains a diminished caseload in addition to chairperson-related duties. The administrative duties of the chairperson are diversified. They include planning and conducting staff meetings; serving as a liaison between the school psychologist, the school personnel and the district administrators; assessing inservice needs; and serving as a resource person for other school psychologists. The wide-ranging duties of the chairperson place significant demands on time. The area chairperson reports to the area ESE director.

The Supervisor of Psychological Services is a newly-created, full-time administrative position with responsibility for budgeting, goal-setting, program planning, monitoring, auditing and evaluating. The Supervisor reports to the Director for ESE Program Services and Area Operations.

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[2]There are only 19 school psychologists assigned to the North Area office. The 20 psychologists cited above reflects a turnover in personnel that occurred during the data collection phase of the evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The basic purpose of this evaluation was to assess the productivity of the Psychological Services Program. A major concern of the program's operation is the continuing backlog of cases awaiting psychological evaluation and the lengthy delays in the entire psychological evaluation process. There are cases where the time between referral and placement exceeds a calendar year. While this excessive delay is not characteristic, delays in the process are common systemwide.

In 1984 the excessive backlog of cases prompted the initiation of two temporary programs to meet the immediate needs of the school system. One program involved a contract with PSI Associates, Inc. to conduct 600 evaluations between June 20, 1984 and October 31, 1984. A total of only 554 evaluations were completed because the PSI staff was unable to locate all the students referred. The second program involved 62 of the district's school psychologists working overtime (evenings and weekends) in order to reduce the backlog. A total of 398 evaluations were completed under this arrangement. Over one-third of these evaluations were done free of charge.

Although the two temporary programs were effective in reducing the backlog of psychological evaluations, they were limited in scope. The complex nature of the psychological evaluation process necessitated a comprehensive approach to this problem. The school psychologist's role is not independent of the other components of the psychological evaluation process. Therefore, the present evaluation examined not only the school psychologist's activities but also the demand for services.

In addition, the quality of psychological evaluations was examined. Quality is an elusive factor to gauge under any circumstance. In this situation, it was particularly difficult due to the nature of the process; and because at present, there exists no measurable definition of minimally acceptable standards.

To summarize, the primary concern of the evaluation was the productivity of program personnel. In order to effectively evaluate productivity, however, qualitative aspects of the program were also addressed. The evaluation examined the entire psychological evaluation process from referral to placement in an effort to answer the following questions:

1. Are current resources sufficient to meet the psychological evaluation needs of all students?

2. To what extent do school psychologists' activities differ from the job description/duties?

3. Considering all the responsibilities of school psychologists, is the productivity (number of psychological evaluations completed) at an acceptable level?

4. Do existing referrals for psychological evaluations result in disproportionately high false-positives, i.e., the student is not eligible for staffing in an exceptional educational program?

5. Is the supervision afforded to the school psychologists appropriate and adequate?

6. Is the quality of psychological services rendered at an acceptable level?

7. Are there management models which, if implemented, could result in the improvement of services?

Evaluation Procedures

A variety of sources were used to obtain data on the Psychological Services Program. They included school psychologists, principals, program files and documents, and program administrators from other large school districts.

Each school psychologist received a questionnaire through the school mail system in April, 1985. The accompanying instructions requested the return of the questionnaire in the envelope provided. They were further directed to refrain from including information such as their name so as to maintain anonymity. Questions were constructed to address the following dimensions: the level of need in Dade County, school psychologist's duties and activities, productivity, psychological evaluation eligibility determinations, supervision, and standards of quality. Both open-ended and multiple answer questions were included. A copy of the school psychologist's questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

A short, supplemental questionnaire was developed for the four area chairpersons. Items on this questionnaire focused on chairperson-related activities. This instrument was sent to the chairpersons in each area. A copy of the supplemental questionnaire is included in Appendix B.

A third questionnaire was developed and disseminated to all elementary, junior and senior high school principals. This questionnaire addressed the backlog status at that particular school, the school psychologist's duties and activities, the standards of quality, and the satisfaction with the psychological evaluation process. Alternative schools and special education centers were excluded due to their unique program structure and staffing patterns. A copy of the principal's questionnaire is included in Appendix C.

Referral logs, supporting documents and case files were examined in each of the four area ESE offices. A random sample of 25 referrals per area ESE office were analyzed in order to obtain data on the nature and demand for services. Cases involving pre-school aged children and the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource Systems (FDLRS) program were excluded from the sample. The data provided descriptive information on the demand for services, from which a referral profile was generated. The files for the 100 sample cases were then examined in-depth to obtain the dates of completion for the major steps in the psychological evaluation process. The amount of time involved for each step in the process was then calculated. This yielded data on the time taken to evaluate and staff the student, as well as the amount of time for each major step in the process.

Finally, a telephone survey was conducted of the following school districts: Broward County (FL), Duval County (FL), Hillsborough County (FL), Houston (TX), Los Angeles (CA), and Philadelphia (PA). The survey's line of inquiry concerned each district's model for providing psychological evaluation services. The survey addressed the following dimensions: the overall psychological evaluation process, the school psychologist's duties, productivity, standards of quality, and satisfaction. A copy of the telephone survey structure is included in Appendix D. The broad questions of the telephone survey were used as a starting point for the discussion of specific program characteristics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introductory Notes

Questionnaires were sent through the school mail system to all school psychologists and principals in the district in mid-April, 1985. As indicated by Table 1, only 52% of the school psychologists had returned the questionnaire by the April 30 deadline. Consequently, the decision was made to continue to accept and process all questionnaires received through May 17, 1985; and on May 3 a reminder notice was forwarded. Because the questionnaires were anonymous, there was no way to determine the non-respondents; this necessitated sending the notice to every school psychologist. During the week of May 6, each area Exceptional Student Education (ESE) director and area chairperson was contacted to ask for assistance in encouraging the return of all questionnaires. The school psychologists were, of course, given the option of requesting a replacement questionnaire in case the original one had been misplaced, but no such requests were received. The extension of the deadline delayed data processing for approximately 2-3 weeks, but permitted the return rate to rise to 73.3%.

Table 1

Response Rates for Questionnaires

		As of the deadline - April 30		As of the extended deadline - May 17		As of June 15	
	Sample Size	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
School Psychologists	75	39	52	54	72	55	73.3
Area Chairpersons	4	3	75	4	100	4	100
Principals	244	201	82.4	220	90.2	221	90.6

The response rate from school psychologists was less than expected. Since the school psychologists were considered to be the primary data source for this evaluation, it was important to obtain data from as many school psychologists as possible. In an effort to identify the cause of the low response rate, the response rates by area were examined to see if there were any differences. Table 2 shows that response rates by area do vary some, but this is seen as a function of the relatively small numbers involved.

Table 2

School Psychologist Response Rates by Area

Area	Number of School Psychologists	Number of Questionnaires Received	Response Rate
North	20	15	75%
North Central	18	12	67%
South Central	18	12	67%
South	18	16	89%

Attitudes toward work were also examined as a possible cause for the low response rate. Analysis of these items in the questionnaire indicated a noticeable degree of dissatisfaction. When asked to rate their morale, more than one-third of the school psychologists stated it was poor. Over 75% reported seeing moderate to severe burnout among their colleagues. Two frequently cited comments from the school psychologists reflect this perspective. First, it was stated that spending almost all of their time in testing activities left them professionally dissatisfied. Second, all but one school psychologist felt that the emphasis on productivity reduced the quality of their work. Job dissatisfaction may be the cause of the low response rate, but it is not possible to determine this from the existing data. To make such a determination would require a follow-up on the non-respondents. This, however, is precluded by the anonymity of the responses. Over one-fourth of the school psychologists did not respond and their exact reasons for this are unknown. Therefore, generalizations from the data collected to all school psychologists must be done with caution.

In contrast to the school psychologists' response rate, the principals' response rate was higher than expected. This may be due to the fact that the principals were asked to either complete the questionnaire themselves or to delegate it to the individual responsible for overseeing psychological evaluations in their school. This provision was made to encourage the completion and the return of the questionnaires. An alternative explanation may be that the respondents were motivated to return the questionnaire because of concern for the psychological evaluation process. Table 3 shows the distribution of the positions held by respondents to this survey. For the purpose of convenience in this report, all respondents to the principal questionnaire are referred to as principals.

Table 3

Position Held by Respondents to the Principal Questionnaire

	Frequency	Percentage
Principal	65	29.5
Assistant Principal	73	33.2
Guidance Chairperson	31	14.1
Counselor	12	5.5
ESE Chairperson	6	2.7
CST Chairperson	4	1.8
Program Specialist	4	1.8
Teacher	3	1.4
Unspecified	22	10.0
TOTAL	220	100%

The principals' response rate was examined by area and level of school (elementary, junior or senior). Table 4 shows the distribution. There is a relatively equivalent distribution by area and level which is, in part, a function of the high response rate. The disparity in percentages among the senior high schools by area is attributed to the small numbers involved.

Table 4

Patterns of Responses for Principals
by Area and Level

	All	N	NC	SC	S	Respondents did not Designate the Area
Total	$\frac{220*}{244}$ = 90.2%	$\frac{53}{63}$ = 84.1%	$\frac{44}{63}$ = 69.8%	$\frac{44}{59}$ = 74.6%	$\frac{47}{60}$ = 78.3%	$\frac{32}{220}$ = 14.5%
Elementary	$\frac{157}{173}$ = 90.8%	$\frac{36}{44}$ = 81.8%	$\frac{32}{46}$ = 69.6%	$\frac{33}{42}$ = 78.6%	$\frac{36}{42}$ = 85.7%	$\frac{20}{157}$ = 12.7%
Junior	$\frac{41}{47}$ = 87.2%	$\frac{11}{12}$ = 91.7%	$\frac{8}{11}$ = 72.7%	$\frac{9}{12}$ = 75%	$\frac{8}{12}$ = 66.7%	$\frac{5}{41}$ = 12.2%
Senior	$\frac{20}{24}$ = 83.3%	$\frac{6}{7}$ = 85.7%	$\frac{4}{6}$ = 66.7%	$\frac{2}{5}$ = 40%	$\frac{3}{6}$ = 50%	$\frac{5}{20}$ = 25%

*Includes two questionnaires with school level data missing.

Level of Need

In order to determine whether allocated resources can meet the needs of all students, there must be a clear delineation of need. How many requests for psychological evaluations are generated in a year? What portion of referrals are for initial, reevaluation and gifted purposes? It is readily agreed that an initial evaluation for "behavioral problems" requires more testing time than a gifted evaluation. The variability by type of evaluation becomes important in estimating the amount of need.

In the initial review of ESE program documents, it was noted that the counts of referrals made are not always accurate. This presents a problem in establishing the level of need for services. It was hoped that the referral logs maintained in each area ESE office would yield an accurate number of referrals. This was not the case. The four area referral logs are not standardized. Apart from the student's name, accompanying information varies from area to area. There is a consistent way of assigning referral numbers, but because it is manually maintained, it is subject to errors. In using the referral numbers to identify cases for inclusion in this study, several numerical errors were noted. For example, in one referral log the numbers jumped from 2,299 to 2,400, hence, the total number of referrals for the year based on this log is inflated.

An estimate of present need can be obtained from data collected from principals. One item on the principal questionnaire asked for the number of students in the school who had been referred for psychological evaluation but were not yet tested. The average number of such students was calculated to be approximately 14. Therefore, it can be calculated that in April, 1985, when the questionnaires were completed, there were approximately 3,416 students (i.e., 244 schools X 14 students) awaiting psychological evaluations. The high response rate of the principals is assurance that this figure provides a good estimate.

Several factors that affected this estimate should be acknowledged. There were 37 (16%) respondents who indicated there was no backlog presently at their school. Another 15% of the respondents indicated that their school had an excess of 25 students waiting to be tested. This clearly demonstrates the variability of need by school. Another factor that may have affected the estimate of need concerns the time of year the data were collected. Normal procedure requires that all reasonable school-based attempts be made to address a student's problem prior to referral for a psychological evaluation. The latter part of the school year may be the natural time to determine the effectiveness of school-based interventions and proceed to the next step of referring the student to the area ESE office for a formal psychological evaluation. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that during the spring there may be an increase in referrals. Indeed, while the contribution to the backlog may not be known exactly, program administrators estimate that there is a 35% increase in referrals during the second semester. Removing the effect of the second semester increase would result in at least 2,530 students waiting for a psychological evaluation at any time during the school year.

Another way to look at the status of the present backlog is to view it from the perspective of school psychologists. The school psychologists who returned the questionnaire had an average of 48 cases awaiting testing in

April, 1985. Computing the estimate of the backlog based on this figure yields 3,360 (i.e., 70 school psychologists, excluding chairpersons X 48 students), which is comparable to the 3,416 yielded by the principals' data. Computing the estimate of backlog while removing the effect of the second semester increase yields a figure of 2,488 students waiting for psychological evaluations at any time during the school year. Thus, regardless of the base of the estimate of the backlog, there are clearly many students awaiting testing.

In addition to the variability of the number of students awaiting testing in each school, there is also variability by the type of psychological evaluation requested. The types of evaluations fall into three broad categories: initial for non-gifted, reevaluation for non-gifted and initial for gifted. To facilitate communication in this report, the three types of psychological evaluations will be referred to respectively as initial, reevaluation and gifted. Data collected for the referral profile and depicted in Table 5 provides some insight to the proportion of different types of psychological evaluations.

Table 5

Types of Psychological Evaluation Referrals
for the 100 Sample Cases

	Number of Cases
Initial	45
Reevaluation	37
Gifted	18
	100

Incidentally, among the 100 sample cases, 4 were identified as non-DCPS students. This is another factor to be considered in determining need, since the district is required to evaluate any student in the county regardless of the affiliation of the originating school. While non-DCPS students comprise a small fraction of the cases, they do contribute to the total need for psychological evaluations.

Finally, an estimate of the need for evaluations in a language other than English was made. The 100 sample cases included ten students who were not evaluated in English. All ten students were Spanish speaking. Nine of these students were scheduled for initial evaluations, and one for a reevaluation. A second estimate of the need for non-English evaluations was obtained from the school psychologists. They indicated that on the average, 18 out of 100 of the cases assigned to them required an evaluation in a language other than English. Thus, regardless of the source of the estimate, there is a clear need for bilingual school psychologists.

Job Duties/Activities

There are six major duties listed for the school psychologist in program documents (see Program Description). Each of the six major duties relates directly to the psychological evaluation process. There is no specific refer-

ence to other types of activities, such as providing staff development to other personnel or counseling students. Nevertheless, school psychologists can engage in non-testing duties by special request from the Area Superintendent, Executive Director of Student Services, principal and/or area and district directors. According to the latest program documents, a recommendation was made in March of 1985 by the Office of Student Support Programs that the school psychologist's role be "realign(ed)... to more adequately address the mental health issues and learning problems of youth. (Because) with the increased emphasis on child abuse, suicide prevention, academic achievement, etc., it is counterproductive to assign the school psychologist to an evaluation role for 80% to 90% of the day".

The desire to expand the range of duties of the school psychologist is mirrored in the responses from the principals. Table 6 depicts the services that the principals would like the school psychologists to provide to their respective schools, as well as the services actually provided. Note that the frequency refers to the 220 responding principals; as such they reflect the number of schools. Based on the principals' responses, the school psychologists are engaged in various testing activities most the time. Other services are being performed, but not to the extent that the principals find satisfactory.

A number of items regarding testing and non-testing duties were included in the school psychologist questionnaire to obtain their perspective on this issue. According to the school psychologists, the activities engaged in most frequently in a typical two week work period are: testing, writing reports, consulting with school personnel, attending CST and M-Team meetings, and observing students. All of these activities relate to the primary duty of evaluating students. In reference to CST and M-Team meetings, eighty percent of the school psychologists indicated that attendance at these meetings was necessary. In the case of CST meetings, they stated their presence was required in order to make recommendations to school personnel and to screen the referrals under consideration. Attendance at M-Team meetings was needed to relate pertinent information, interpret findings, make recommendations and communicate with parents. The school psychologists made the following suggestions for improving CST meetings: broaden school personnel's knowledge of psychological principles; increase teacher input; require teachers to bring records, work samples, and supporting data; schedule CST meetings more frequently and consistently; and facilitate the teacher's attendance by arranging for coverage of that teacher's class. According to the school psychologists, the ways to improve M-Team meetings include: increase teacher input; encourage parental involvement; conduct meetings in a more efficient manner; and have a pre-meeting conference with the placement specialist.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that ESE program administrators are presently implementing a plan to streamline the reevaluation process. As previously noted, special education students are required by law to be reevaluated every three years. The streamlining of the process basically involves a reduction in the number of tests required in the reevaluation. This change should provide more time for school psychologists to perform other testing and non-testing activities. The plan has not been implemented to the point that the impact could be evaluated. However, the opinions of the responding school psychologists indicated overwhelming support of the plan.

Table 6

Current and Desired Services Provided
by the School Psychologists Based on
the Survey of 220 Principals

	Current Services		Desired Services		Difference
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage	Percentage
Testing/Evaluating referred students	220	100.0	216	98.2	- 1.8
Consulting with individual teachers	176	80.0	211	95.9	+ 15.9
Providing staff development/inservice to school personnel	30	13.6	148	67.3	+ 53.7
Providing counseling to students and/or parents	89	40.5	161	73.2	+ 32.7
Providing workshops to students and/or parents	9	4.1	101	45.9	+ 41.8

Productivity

As mentioned earlier, accurate counts of psychological evaluations completed are not routinely collected. To obtain an estimate, school psychologists were asked how many psychological evaluations they had done in the last 20 work days (roughly one calendar month). Based on their responses, it was calculated that an average of 15 cases per school psychologist had been completed in the month preceding the dissemination of the questionnaires. Multiplying the average (15) by the number of school psychologists excluding chairpersons (70), yields a total of 1,050 evaluations that were estimated to have been done in that month. There are some concerns, however, regarding the utility of this estimate that should be acknowledged. Does the average stay the same if information had been obtained from the 20 school psychologists who did not respond to the questionnaire? Does this "monthly" figure of 1050 remain constant throughout the year? The evaluation was unable to answer these questions.

An indirect method of gauging productivity involved the review of the 100 sample cases to determine the length of time it takes to complete a psychological evaluation. The entire process from CST to M-Team staffing was examined. The amount of time between each of the six major steps in the psychological evaluation process was calculated. Of the 100 sample cases in the analysis, 48 had been completed and all pertinent data were available. These 48 cases were divided into 2 groups: those cases that were initiated and completed entirely within the regular school year (n=19), and those cases that were carried over into the summer months (n=29). For the former group, the time between major steps was calculated in student school days, i.e., holidays and teacher planning days were excluded. For the latter group, time between the major steps of the psychological evaluation during the summer was calculated based on normal work days for 12 month employees during the summer months.

The major steps in the psychological evaluation process, as well as the time required to complete them for the 48 cases, is depicted in Table 7. It is important to remember that this data describes the time taken to complete the psychological evaluation process from referral to staffing from the students' perspective. An examination of Table 7 shows that for cases evaluated (steps 1-6) during the school year the average turnaround time from referral to staffing was 77 student school days (approximately four calendar months). It took 15 student school days (approximately three calendar weeks) for schools to complete and forward the referral information to the area ESE office (steps 1-2). Principals commented frequently that preparing the referral packet for the area ESE office took a considerable amount of time. The most frequently cited reasons were delays in obtaining the necessary reports such as the student's social history, speech evaluation, and vision/hearing screening. There were also delays in obtaining parental consent.

Only one-third of the total time (26 student school days) required for the completion of the psychological evaluation during the school year was attributable to the actual testing of the student by the school psychologist (steps 2-3). It should be noted, furthermore, that several factors beyond the school psychologist's control can contribute to the average of 26 days required for testing. For example, there can normally be up to five working days lag time in receiving the case. It is possible that a referral may be received at the area ESE office on Monday, but the school psychologist will not get the case until the single day of the week he is in the area ESE office. If that day is Friday, the process is delayed by one week. Furthermore, because of the large

Table 7

Time Required to Complete the Major Steps
in the Psychological Evaluation Process

		Major Steps: CST (1)	Referral to Area Office (2)	Report Completed (3)	Report Typed (4)	Case Closed (5)	Staffing (6)	Summary	
		Referral Time Steps 1 - 2	Testing Time Steps 2 - 3	Typing Time Steps 3 - 4	Closing Case Time Steps 4 - 5	Staffing Time Steps 5 - 6		Time case is open by school psychologist Steps 2 - 5	Total Time of Process Steps 1 - 6
Cases processed within the regular school year	Range of Work Days	1 - 49	1 - 75	1 - 41	0 - 20	3 - 76		8 - 91	14 - 153
	Average Number of Work Days	15	26	10	5	21		41	77
	% of Entire Process	19	34	13	7	27		53	100
Cases processed during the regular school year and the summer	Range of Work Days	1 - 172	3 - 209	0 - 149	0 - 34	6 - 102		10 - 239	54 - 281
	Average Number of Work Days	38	65	18	8	34		91	163
	% of Entire Process	23	40	11	5	21		56	100

number of students waiting to be tested, the most recently referred student may have to wait as the school psychologist already has other students needing testing. Should this student be tested quickly the testing for the other students is delayed. Thus, because of the backlog, testing of some students must be deferred. Another example of a common delay is caused by the fact that usually school psychologists are scheduled at assigned schools once a week. If the student to be tested should happen to be absent that one day, the process could be delayed by one week. This problem is reflected in the responses given by principals on their questionnaire. Half of these respondents stated that they needed the school psychologist in the school more than one day per week to adequately address that school's need. Finally, according to the principals, further delays are attributable to the fact that school psychologists are often "pulled" for meetings and/or staffings. The testing-related duties, such as attendance at CST and M-Team meetings, directly impact on the school psychologist's productivity. Earlier, productivity was defined as the number of students tested by the school psychologist in a given period of time. Hence, the time the school psychologist spends attending CST and M-Team meetings decreases the time he has available to test students.

Delays like the ones described above are not uncommon; the in-depth case analysis uncovered several examples. In one instance, a case was closed without testing 3 1/2 months after the referral. A summary progress sheet, stapled to the inside of the student's area ESE file, listed three unsuccessful attempts to test the student: December 10, December 17, and January 16. The student officially withdrew from school on February 11. In two other cases notations had been made indicating that the students had moved out of state following the referrals. All three files mentioned here were from the North Central Area. That area's practice of having a summary progress sheet to record such events proved to be invaluable in providing a clear explanation for the delays in the process.

Another case proved to be more complex. Between July, 1980, and April, 1985, the student changed elementary schools at least seven times. The reasons for the initial referral included excessive absenteeism and academic performance below grade level. Due to repeated retentions the student was some years older than her peers. The CST chairperson at the student's present school investigated the situation and found that the home environment was unstable. The student's only family in South Florida was the father who does not have steady employment. The student is left without any supervision during the day in the one room they share in a boarding house. The details of this case illustrate two points. First, the unstable home environment of many of the students referred for psychological evaluation often complicate the school psychologist's task. Second, a summary progress sheet like the one used in the North Central Area ESE Office would facilitate an understanding of all attempts made to evaluate a student, and thus eliminate the need to investigate at length.

A further examination of Table 7 shows that there is an average of three weeks between writing the report and closing the case (steps 3-5). This time span should be reduced by the recent hiring of support persons at the area ESE offices whose jobs include typing psychological evaluation reports. Table 7 also reveals that the scheduling of staffings is taking an average of four weeks (steps 5-6). In reference to this substantial span of time, the principals commented that arranging for staffings was a difficult task due to the schedule considerations for all the personnel involved. The most time-consuming factor, however, appears to be the effect of carrying the psychological

evaluation into the summer. This situation essentially doubles the average time required to complete the evaluation.

Comments made by both school psychologists and principals on the questionnaires indicated that there are other problems encountered in evaluating students that were not noted in the review of the 100 sample cases. These include: excessive student absences, inability to locate students in secondary schools, and arranging for an appropriate testing environment. School psychologists were polled for suggestions to minimize these problems. In reference to the problem of attendance, many respondents indicated that they called ahead to determine if the student to be tested was in school. Others said they came to the school prepared to test more than one student.

The subject of productivity was raised during the telephone survey of other school systems. Two of the six school systems indicated that they have productivity standards as part of their overall monitoring of the program and the staff. Duval County, whose school psychologists are primarily involved in testing, indicated that one student evaluation per day was considered satisfactory. In Houston, where school psychologists have limited non-testing duties in addition to their testing duties, a standard of four evaluations per week was considered satisfactory.

False-Positive Rate

Some psychological evaluations will result in the determination that a student is not eligible for a special education program. This outcome, which is referred to as the false-positive rate, provides an indication of how well the students are screened by the school's CST prior to making a referral. A very high false-positive rate could be an indication of weaknesses in the screening activities. Conversely, an extremely low false-positive rate may indicate that eligible students are being "screened out". The difficulty arises in determining an appropriate level for this rate. The determination of this level is important because an excessively high false-positive rate hampers efficiency and wastes resources.

In the course of reviewing the 100 sample cases, information regarding eligibility and non-eligibility was sought. Table 8 shows the results for the 88 cases where eligibility had been determined. The 24% false-positive rate for initial evaluations means that for every four students being evaluated for the first time (excluding gifted), one is determined to be ineligible. Responding school psychologists estimated the rate to be somewhat higher at 34%.

Table 8

Eligibility and False-Positive Rates

	Initial	Reevaluations	Gifted
Total cases	37	33	18
Number of cases determined to be eligible	28	30	6
False-positive rate (in percentages)	24%	9.1%	67%

Theoretically, all students being reevaluated should continue to be eligible. When the 9.1% false-positive rate was calculated for reevaluations, it was investigated further. It was found that eligibility criteria had been tightened recently to the point that some students who had been marginally eligible in the previous psychological evaluation were now ineligible. The rate of 9.1% can then be viewed as a function of the current, narrower eligibility criteria.

For gifted evaluations, the false-positive rate was 67%. School psychologists estimated the false-positive rate for gifted evaluations to be roughly 50%. The rate for gifted evaluations is clearly higher than for initial non-gifted evaluations. There are two possible reasons for this: parental pressure to have a child in a gifted program, or lack of a clear understanding of eligibility criteria for gifted programs on the part of school personnel. Regardless of the reason, an improvement in the screening of gifted referrals could reduce the false-positive rate and in turn reduce the backlog of cases.

Supervision

As previously noted, the four area ESE directors are responsible for the supervision of the school psychologist. Since none of the directors have a degree in psychology or psychological measurement, any supervision afforded the school psychologist does not address the technical aspects of a psychological evaluation. When asked whether supervision received from the area ESE director was appropriate and adequate, 56% of the school psychologists stated it was not. Many of the accompanying comments cited a lack of technical knowledge as the reason.

The same question was posed with regard to the area chairperson. Of the respondents, 37% indicated that supervision was not adequate and appropriate. Accompanying comments indicate a desire for a person trained in psychology to be a full-time administrator with direct authority to supervise. This view is also reflected in the responses of the chairpersons. All chairpersons mentioned various aspects of supervision as one of the most important activities of an area chairperson. Furthermore, the chairpersons indicated that these important supervisory tasks are either not being done at all or are inadequately done.

The telephone survey of other programs across the nation revealed that five out of the six school systems surveyed provided some degree of supervision by a trained psychologist. For example, Broward County has full-time psychological service area coordinators in each of three areas, as well as a full-time clinical psychologist available for consultation.

Quality

Any consideration of productivity necessarily implies that minimally acceptable standards of quality have been established and met. A variety of data sources were used to elicit opinions/experiences on this subject. Both school psychologists and principals were asked about acceptable standards, as were respondents to the telephone survey of other school districts.

Principals were asked their opinion of the overall quality of the psychological evaluation process. More than 90% indicated that the quality was in the adequate to excellent range. Responses from school psychologists to the same question yielded similar results; 92.5% indicated that the quality was in the adequate to excellent range. A second question was put to the principals that was designed to ask a similar but more indirect question: "To what extent do

you agree with the findings and recommendations in psychological evaluation reports?" Again, more than 90% indicated either "frequently" or "almost all of the time". In general, there would appear to be a high degree of satisfaction regarding the quality of psychological evaluations.

An essential element in the quality of a psychological evaluation is the timeliness of the services. In reference to this issue, the principals were asked what they considered to be a maximum acceptable turnaround time for different types of psychological evaluations (initial, gifted and emergency). Turnaround time is defined as the number of days between the referral and the staffing (steps 2-6 in Table 7). The results are depicted in Table 9. According to the principals, the maximum acceptable turnaround time for initial and gifted evaluations are respectively 44.7 and 39.6 school days, or approximately two calendar months. For an initial emergency evaluation, the maximum turnaround time should be 20.8 school days or one calendar month.

Table 9

Maximum Acceptable Turnaround Time for Determining Eligibility by Type of Case

Type of Evaluation	Maximum acceptable turnaround time in school days
Initial	44.7
Initial-Emergency	20.8
Gifted	39.6

The data collected from the analysis of the 100 sample cases do not meet the principals' standards. The average turnaround time for initial cases during the regular school year is 60 school days, which exceeds the principals' standard by 34%. For gifted evaluations the average is 50 school days, which exceeds the principals' standard by 26%. These figures should not be taken as definitive because of the small sample involved. More importantly, the variation between cases suggests that the use of averages for this type of information may be inappropriate. For the initial evaluations, the actual turnaround time ranged from 41 to 128 school days. If the cases that were worked on during the summer months were included, the maximum turnaround time rises to 281 school days. This variability applies to reevaluations and gifted evaluations as well. Consequently, extreme caution must be used in relying on averages as the standard; under no conditions should this be the only standard of acceptable quality.

The testing environment has a direct impact on the quality of the psychological evaluation. Interruptions and distractions should be kept to a minimum so that accurate test results can be obtained. Questions regarding the quality of the testing environment were included on both the school psychologist and principal questionnaires. Only 15% of the school psychologists said the testing environment in the schools was adequate. The school psychologists were also asked how the testing environment could be improved. The most frequently cited suggestions in order of frequency are as follows: reduce noise level, ensure privacy, provide adequate ventilation, and provide appropriate furniture. A comparable response was obtained from the principals. Over 85% indicated that there was no appropriate space in their school for conducting psychological evaluations.

Like the testing environment, the school psychologist's office environment also impacts on the quality of psychological evaluations produced. A question regarding work space at the area ESE office was included in the questionnaire to school psychologists. A little more than half said that the work space at the area ESE office was not adequate. The most frequently cited reasons were: having to share a desk, no quiet place to work, and lack of accessibility to a telephone.

The most important aspect of the standards of quality has not yet been addressed. This is the validity of the psychological evaluation itself. Validity refers to the accuracy of the psychological evaluation in assessing the student's needs. Unfortunately, there is presently no systematic, formal monitoring system for assessing whether tests are administered properly and interpreted correctly. It would appear that the first step in initiating such a system would be to provide adequate technical supervision of the school psychologists.

Other Models

The success of a management model in another school district does not necessarily imply that the same model would succeed in Dade County. Nevertheless, an examination of these models does afford a better perspective of our own. As previously stated, six major school districts were surveyed by telephone. They included: Broward County (FL), Duval County (FL), Hillsborough County (FL), Houston (TX), Los Angeles (CA), and Philadelphia (PA). Los Angeles and Houston school districts were selected for inclusion because, like Dade County, they are large school districts with substantial Hispanic populations. Broward, Duval and Hillsborough Counties were included because they are located in the state, affording a certain level of comparability.

The telephone survey revealed a considerable variation in the management models used by the six districts. For example, Houston contracts out for all Emotionally Handicapped (EH) evaluations and some reevaluations. Broward, Duval and Los Angeles do not contract out for psychological evaluations. In another example, Houston and Los Angeles do not consider gifted programs as part of the special education programs. On the other hand, Philadelphia's program does include gifted. A third example is provided by the difference in the psychologist/student ratios depicted in Table 10. Yet, despite these variations in the models, five of the six districts expressed satisfaction with the performance of their respective models.

Table 10 shows that Dade County has the highest psychologist/student ratio of the school districts in the telephone survey. While the data obtained in the survey must be interpreted with caution, the data do appear to support a reduction in Dade County's ratio. Determining the ideal ratio, however, is complex, since there are a number of factors that must be considered when comparing the ratios across districts. These factors include differences in the level of need, differences in the job description of the school psychologist, differences in the efficiency of the referral screening, differences in the policy for contracting out cases, etc. Such considerations could explain why Duval County, which has a psychologist/student ratio comparable to Dade County, reported satisfaction with their existing program.

Information on monitoring systems of the school psychologists' activities was also sought from the telephone survey. An effective monitoring system should be able to accurately identify the kinds of activities engaged in by the school psychologist, as well as the amount of time spent on these activities. This line of inquiry revealed that most other school districts use an allocation of staff that is similar to Dade County. The school psychologist is usually assigned to four schools with one day a week designated for each school. As previously noted, the principals in Dade County indicated that this arrangement contributed to delays in the psychological evaluation process, because, for one thing, the school psychologists were often pulled for meetings and staffings in other schools. In Broward County and Philadelphia, however, school psychologists cannot be pulled from their assigned day at a given school. This stable schedule makes it easy for the school administrator to plan staffings and other activities. Monitoring of psychologists' time at work also becomes a simple, straightforward task.

Table 10

Comparison of School Psychologist/Student Ratios
of the School Systems Surveyed

School System	School Psychologist/ Student Ratio	Are Gifted Evaluations Included?	Comments
Dade	1 : 3190	Yes	
Broward	1 : 2202	Yes	
Duval	1 : 3189	Yes	Has a counselor in each school.
Hillsborough	1 : 2633	Yes	Contracts out on a limited basis.
Houston	1 : 2082	No	Contracts out EH evaluations and re-evaluations; has 150 psychologists for non-testing activities.
Los Angeles	1 : 2714	No	
Philadelphia	1 : 2270	Yes	

Finally, mention should be made of Houston's innovative use of computers. Houston relies heavily on the use of computers, and each school has their own computer terminal. The school psychologists use the computer for scoring tests, inputting time/activity information and writing psychological evaluation reports. The reports are written using a word processing program that contains the "shell" of the report. The school psychologist simply goes to the terminal at that school and inserts individual information into the "shell". The computer can also be accessed for student information, achievement test scores, etc. According to the Director of Support Services in Houston, the reports are thus prepared faster, with minimal errors and without the use of typing personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

The continuing backlog of students awaiting psychological evaluations and the delays common to the process have raised concerns regarding the productivity of the Psychological Services Program. This evaluation sought to ascertain the reason for the backlog and the delays. The specific focus of the evaluation was presented in the Methodology as a series of seven questions, which can now be addressed:

1. Are current resources sufficient to meet the psychological evaluation needs of all students?

   The number of students awaiting psychological evaluations represents a formidable backlog. The estimate obtained from school psychologists indicate that, as of April 1985, there were 3,360 students awaiting a psychological evaluation. The estimate of 3,416 students, obtained from the principals, concurs. While the deficiencies in the program's information system forced a dependence on estimates, the relative agreement of the two estimates indicates that they adequately represent the existing need for program services. At the present level of efficiency and staffing the current resources of the program are unable to meet the psychological evaluation needs of all students.

2. To what extent do school psychologists' activities differ from the job description/duties?

   The data provided by both the school psychologists and principals indicated that school psychologists are engaged in testing and related activities almost all of the time. The emphasis on testing and related activities is congruent with the school psychologists' job description (see Program Description). However, the data also indicated that the school psychologists, as well as the principals, want some diversification of duties to allow more time for consultation with school personnel and student counseling. In effect, this means that there is interest in shifting the emphasis from "testing only" to include other kinds of services.

3. Considering all the responsibilities of school psychologists, is the productivity (number of psychological evaluations completed) at an acceptable level?

   It was estimated that in the month preceding data collection for the evaluation, the school psychologists completed 1,050 psychological evaluations, which represents an average of 15 per school psychologist. At present, there are no district standards by which to judge the adequacy of this level of productivity. However, this rate is comparable to other school systems contacted in the telephone survey.

4. Do existing referrals for psychological evaluations result in disproportionately high false-positives, i.e. the student is not eligible for staffing in an exceptional educational program?

   A high false-positive rate could mean that the school psychologist's time is not being used efficiently because the screening process is not working

effectively. By contrast, a low false-positive rate could mean that students with borderline eligibility are being "screened out". The ideal false-positive rate falls between these two extremes. The data collected indicated that the false-positive rate for initial evaluations in Dade County is 24%. By comparison, Houston, which was the only district in the telephone survey to collect such information, reported a rate of 25%. Since there is no feasible way to pinpoint the ideal rate, the comparability of these two rates is at least reassuring. On the other hand, evaluations for gifted placement in Dade County, which represent approximately 20% of all cases, had a false-positive rate of about 67%. If the screening for such referrals could be improved so that this false-positive rate recedes, it would subsequently mean a reduction in the number of cases in the backlog.

5. Is the supervision afforded the school psychologists appropriate and adequate?

   The data indicated that the supervision received by school psychologists is not appropriate. Presently, the school psychologists are supervised by the area ESE directors who have no formal training as psychologists. Therefore, the supervision provided is limited to administrative issues and does not address technical issues such as the scoring and interpretation of achievement and personality tests.

6. Is the quality of the psychological services rendered at an acceptable level?

   Presently, the program lacks acceptable standards of quality. The existing standards are vague and unmeasureable. Nevertheless, principals indicated overwhelming satisfaction with the overall quality of the psychological evaluation reports as well as the recommendations made in the reports. Yet, an essential element in the quality of psychological evaluations is the timeliness of the services rendered. The principals were clearly not satisfied with the length of time currently needed to complete a psychological evaluation.

7. Are there management models which, if implemented, could result in the improvement of services?

   The telephone survey of six school districts nationwide revealed considerable variations in their programs. Yet, all but one district expressed satisfaction with their current program. This underscores the necessity to design a psychological services program according to local needs. Two findings from the telephone survey should be noted. First, effective systems for monitoring the staff's time and activities were identified in the models used by Broward County and Philadelphia. In these two cases, the school psychologist is not pulled from his regularly scheduled day at the school for staffings and meetings elsewhere. This facilitated the scheduling of meetings involving the school psychologist for that particular school as well as monitoring the school psychologists' time and activities. Second, it should be noted that Houston was able to provide the most complete information during the telephone interview. This is attributable to their reliance on a computerized information system. The school psychologists use the computer terminal at the schools to access student information, score tests, write the final report and input time and activity information. This system reduces the time needed to complete these tasks and minimizes errors in the information itself.

In summary, there is currently a formidable number of students awaiting psychological evaluations. This backlog exists despite the fact that school psychologists are engaged in testing activities most of the time, and their productivity is comparable to other school systems. Therefore, it can be concluded that the district's level of need has overwhelmed the existing staff of school psychologists. To remedy this problem, it will be necessary to increase the staff. Determining the exact number of new psychologists needed, however, is difficult, since there is some evidence that certain components in the psychological evaluation process are not operating at optimal efficiency. The correction of this situation would minimize the number of new psychologists needed; and thus provide the most economical solution to the problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Revise the information system for the program on a districtwide basis, so that the information collected is consistent across the area ESE offices. Specifically, provisions should be made to collect descriptive information regarding referrals which include the school of origin, the type of psychological evaluation requested, the special language requirements and the eligibility determinations. Information collected could be used to monitor the level of need, the productivity and the eligibility determinations. School psychologist time/activity reports should also be revised with the goal of providing complete and accurate information of the services rendered and the time expended. Monitoring the school psychologists' time and activities could provide a basis for accountability. The use of a summary progress sheet attached to each case file should be considered. Such a form would be useful in monitoring the progress of individual cases and documenting the frequency and causes of delays. Finally, during the telephone survey of other major public school systems, it became evident that Houston has an extremely efficient information system. Houston relies heavily on computers to collect descriptive information, to access student information, to score psychological tests, to write psychological evaluation reports, and to monitor the school psychologists' time and activities. Therefore, an examination of the Houston model may provide this district with practical ideas for improving the information system.

2. Review the psychological evaluation process from the initial Child Study Team (CST) meeting to the staffing at the Multidisciplinary Team (M-Team) meeting in order to identify and improve the components in the process that may not be operating at optimal efficiency. The improvements generated by such a review may result in a favorable impact on the existing backlog of psychological evaluations.

3. Consider the feasibility of diversifying the school psychologist's duties and activities. Diversifying duties would address the varied psychological needs of students, as well as the low morale and high burnout of school psychologists. In considering the feasibility of this recommendation, the existing backlog of psychological evaluations must, of course, be taken into consideration. This recommendation would require a change in the current function of the school psychologist, and it could not be implemented without a reduction in the number of cases and/or an increase in the existing staff of school psychologists.

4. Continue the process of establishing standards of quality for psychological evaluations. Standards of quality relate to both the quality and timeliness of services. Standards of quality could serve as a guideline in evaluating future program and staff performance.

5. Establish a system for providing appropriate technical supervision for school psychologists. Supervision should be provided on an ongoing basis for all school psychologists by individuals with appropriate professional credentials. Given the existing structure of the program, the area chairpersons could provide the necessary supervision if relieved of their caseload responsibilities. While relieving the chairpersons of their caseloads would aggravate the existing backlog of psychological evaluations, in the long run the increased efficiency in the program provided by adequate supervision should to a degree offset the immediate cutback.

6. Consider re-instituting temporary measures to reduce the current backlog of psychological evaluations. At the present productivity rate, the school psychologists would need at least 3 1/2 months to evaluate those students who have already been referred, without regard to new referrals. While there is some evidence that the efficiency of the present evaluation process can be improved, it is doubtful that the efficiency could be increased quickly enough to a level that would provide relief for the immediate backlog problem.

7. Expand the existing staff of school psychologists in order to meet the district's level of need for pyschological evaluations. While the final, appropriate level of staffing cannot be determined at this time, program administrators have indicated that there is currently sufficient data to make a conservative estimate of the immediate need for additional staff. It is recommended that the expansion of the staff based on this estimate proceed at this time. Further staffing needs, however, should be based on a review of the effectiveness of the efforts to optimize the efficiency of the entire process (in compliance with recommendation #2).

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST QUESTIONNAIRE

MISSING

DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST QUESTIONNAIRE

As part of the present evaluation of Psychological Services, we are requesting that you answer the following questions based on your experience as a school psychologist. Return the completed survey in the enclosed return envelope by Tuesday, April 30, 1985. Do not put your name on this survey. If you have any questions, please call Ms. Marianne Strusinski or Mr. Joe Gomez at 376-1506.

1. Circle the area to which you are presently assigned to:

N	NC	SC	S	
14(25.9%)	12(22.2%)	12(22.2%)	16(29.6%)	N = 75
70%	66.7%	66.7%	88.9%	n = 54

2. How long have you been a school psychologist?

   x = 10.93 Years

3. In your opinion, your attendance at Child Study Team (CST) meetings is
   - 43(79.6%) always necessary.
   - 11(20.4%) only necessary in selected cases.
   - - rarely necessary.
   - - never necessary.

4. What do you think is the most important reason for the school psychologist to attend CST meetings?

   _____

5. Is there any way the CST meetings could be improved?
   - 40(70.1%) No — 4(7.4%)
   - 10(18.5%) Yes, explain _____

   _____

   _____

6. In your opinion, your attendance at Multidisciplinary Team (M-Team) meetings is: — 1(1.9%)
   - 44(81.5%) always necessary.
   - 9(16.7%) only necessary in selected cases.
   - - rarely necessary.
   - - never necessary.

7. What do you think is the most important reason for the school psychologist to attend M-Team meetings?

   _____

MISSING

8. Is there any way the M-Team meetings could be improved? 8(14.8%)

33(61.1%) No

13(24.1%) Yes, explain _____

_____

_____

9. Check the statement that most closely matches your views. 3(5.6%)

32(59.3%) Placement specialists are needed because they provide detailed information on the resources in the county to effect appropriate placements.

16(29.6%) Placement specialists duplicate some of the work of the school psychologist.

3(5.6%) Placement specialists are not needed, the school psychologist can assume their responsibilities easily.

10. Check the statement that most closely reflects your opinion on re-evaluations for each of the following exceptionalities:

	emotionally handicapped	learning disabled	EMH/ TMH	Physically Impaired
Continue to re-evaluate in all cases	48(88.9%)	17(31.5%)	19(35.2%)	5(9.3%)
Re-evaluate only selected cases	6(11.1%)	35(64.8%)	33(61.1%)	40(74.1%)
Do not re-evaluate any cases	-	2(3.7%)	1(1.9%)	7(13.0%)

11. List 3 major causes of delay in completing an evaluation of a student.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

12. Do you have any suggestions which, if implemented, could decrease the time between referral and placement?

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. Based on your experience, what is the approximate percentage of referrals for gifted evaluations that result in placement in a gifted program?

x = 47.88 %

MISSING

14. Based on your experience, what is the approximate percentage of referrals for initial evaluations that result in placement in a special education class?

x = 66.46 %

15. Based on your experience, what is the approximate percentage of re-evaluations that need to be conducted in a language OTHER THAN ENGLISH?

x = 17.53 %

16. What is the total number of cases presently assigned to you?

x = 45.55

17. Of the total number of currently assigned cases, how many are complete except for writing and/or typing the final report?

x = 8.98

18. How many assigned but not yet tested cases do you have at this time?

x = 37.04

19. During the last 20 work days, how many evaluation reports did you write?

x = 14.75

20. Is the professional supervision that you presently receive from your program director appropriate and adequate?

24(44.4%) Yes

30(55.6%) No, explain: _____

_____

21. Is the professional supervision that you presently receive from your area chairperson appropriate and adequate? 1(1.9%)

33(61.1%) Yes

20(37.0%) No, explain: _____

_____

22. Do you consider the criteria by which you are evaluated appropriate and adequate?

15(27.8%) Yes 3(5.6%)
36(66.7%) No, explain: _____

_____

_____

23. Below is a list of activities in which you may engage while performing your job. Indicate the frequency of each activity in a typical 10-day period. For example, "participating sometimes (2-3 occasions)" in an activity indicates that you engaged in the activity on 2 or 3 different occasions during a typical 10-day period. You may add up to 3 activities that are not listed. Be sure to mark the frequency for those activities you added.

		Almost all of the time (6 or more occasions)	Frequently (4 to 5 occasions)	Sometimes (2 to 3 occasions)	Rarely (1 occasion)	Never	X
a)	Attend Child Study Team (CST) meetings	5	4	3 *	2	1	3.56
b)	Complete and submit M-Team report to Area Program Director	5 *	4	3	2	1	3.35
c)	Administer tests to student(s) and review student data	5 *	4	3	2	1	4.89
d)	Observe student(s)	5	4	3 *	2	1	3.42
e)	Write up evaluation findings into report form	5 *	4	3	2	1	4.69
f)	Attend M-Team meetings	5	4	3 *	2	1	3.45
g)	Consult with Placement Specialist	5	4	3 *	2	1	3.02
h)	Receive supervision	5	4	3	2	1 *	1.71
i)	Attend staff development(s)	5	4	3	2 *	1	2.06
j)	Provide consultation to teachers and/or other school personnel	5	4	3 *	2	1	3.7
k)	Counsel students and/or parents	5	4	3 *	2	1	2.78
l)	Provide staff development(s)	5	4	3	2 *	1	1.59
m)	Provide training to students and or parents	5	4	3	2	1 *	1.49
n)	_____	5	4	3	2	1	
o)	_____	5	4	3	2	1	
p)	_____	5	4	3	2	1	

* denotes mode

MISSING

24. Is your workspace adequate in the schools to which you are assigned?

8(14.8%) Yes, in all schools
40(74.1%) Only in some schools
6(11.1%) No, not at schools

25. If your workspace at any of your schools is inadequate list up to 3 things needed to improve the quality of that space.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

26. Is your workspace at the area office adequate?

23(42.6%) yes
29(53.7%) no, explain: _____ 2(3.7%)

_____

_____

27. Check the items that describe your experience with getting reports typed. (Check all that apply.)

19(35.2%) It is a fast and easy process.
11(20.4%) It takes a long time to get reports typed.
49(90.7%) It is typed at the area office.
13(24.1%) It is typed at the school.
35(64.8%) Confidentiality seems to be maintained.
8(14.8%) There is a problem with confidentiality.
29(53.7%) The quality of typing is at an acceptable level.
20(37.0%) The quality of typing is substandard.

28. Check the statement that best describes the personnel in your schools.

38(70.4%) For the most part, faculty and staff have primarily accurate understanding and realistic expectations of the school psychologist's role. 3(5.6%)

13(24.1%) For the most part, faculty and staff have primarily erroneous understanding and/or unrealistic expectations of the school psychologist's role.

29. Is information on students referred:

complete?	28(51.9%)	yes	24(44.4%)	sometimes	1(1.9%)	no	1(1.9%)
accurate?	23(42.6%)	yes	27(50.0%)	sometimes	-	no	4(7.4%)
easy to find?	32(59.3%)	yes	18(33.3%)	sometimes	-	no	4(7.4%)
current?	22(40.7%)	yes	28(51.9%)	sometimes	-	no	4(7.4%)

Comments: _____

_____

30. Below is a list of situations which you may encounter in the course of your work. Indicate the extent to which you experience these situations.

	Almost all of the time (6 or more occasions)	Frequently (4 to 5 occasions)	Sometimes (2 to 3 occasions)	Rarely (1 occasion)	Never	X
Student does not attend the school	5	4	3	2 *	1	2.1
Arrive at school to find student is absent	5	4	3	2 *	1	2.67
Unable to locate student within the school	5	4	3	2 *	1	2.28
Student speaks a language in which you are not fluent	5	4	3	2 *	1	1.83
Incomplete or missing information in student's file	5	4	3	2 *	1	2.78

* denotes mode

31. You may have developed for yourself a system to cut down on time spent looking for students, locating appropriate testing materials, going to a school to find the student is not in school today, etc. Please describe anything you do to minimize these situations and the drain on your time.

_____

_____

_____

_____

32. Complete the following statement with the choice that most closely reflects your opinion. MISSING

The emphasis on increased productivity, that is, the number of students evaluated:

1(1.9%)

1(1.9%) does not decrease the quality of psychological evaluations.

25(46.3%) moderately decreases the quality of psychological evaluations.

27(50.0%) severely decreases the quality of psychological evaluations.

Comment: _____

_____

MISSING

33. Based on your experience, what is the <u>average time for the testing portion</u> of an evaluation for the following types of students?

	Average time in minutes	Average time in hours (rounded)
<u>Initial</u>		
Emotionally handicapped	273	4 1/2
Learning disabled	212	3 1/2
Educable/trainable mentally retarded	106	1 3/4
Physically impaired	165	2 3/4
Gifted	115	2
<u>Re-evaluation</u>		
Emotionally handicapped	254	4 1/4
Learning disabled	171	2
Educable/trainable mentally retarded	147	2 1/2
Physically impaired	141	2 1/2

34. Do you have adequate opportunity to attend continuing education lectures/courses? 2(3.7%)

37(68.5%) Yes
15(27.8%) No, explain: _____

_____

_____

35. How would you rate your <u>morale</u>?

30(55.6%) good
19(35.2%) poor, explain: _____ 5(9.3%)

_____

_____

36. How would you rate the amount of <u>burnout</u> you see among your fellow psychologists? 1(1.9%)

8(14.8%) very severe
33(61.6%) moderate
11(20.4%) very little
1(1.9%) no burnout at all

MISSING

37. Do you have adequate testing materials with which to evaluate students?

31(57.4%) Yes
4(7.4%) No
19(35.2%) Sometimes

38. If you don't always have adequate testing materials please list all materials needed.

_____

_____

39. Do you have adequate access to professional books, journals and other information?

19(35.2%) Yes
35(64.8%) No

40. List all languages other than English in which you are fluent and can conduct a psychological evaluation.

Spanish - 16
French - 3
Italian - 2
Sign Language (for hearing impaired) - 2
Russian - 1
German - 1

34 None, other than English

41. In your area, is there a system for designating emergency or priority cases?

43(79.6%) Yes
4(7.4%) No
7(13.0%) Don't know

If you answered "yes" to question 41, respond to the following two items:

A. Describe the system in your area.

_____

_____

_____

B. Does this system actually work in reducing the amount of time needed for evaluation and/or placement for an emergency or priority case? 8(14.8%)

30(55.6%) Yes
6(11.1%) No
10(18.5%) Don't know

MISSING

42. Given the opportunity and credentials, would you transfer to another 12-month job at a comparable salary within the school system? 2(3.7%)

26(48.1%)	No, I would not.
18(33.3%)	I would give it serious consideration.
8(14.8%)	Yes, I would.

43. In your opinion, the quality of the psychological evaluation process is: 1(1.9%)

8(14.8%)	excellent.
20(37.0%)	good.
21(38.9%)	adequate.
4(7.4%)	poor.

Comment: _____

44. In your opinion, the productivity of the psychological evaluation process is: 1(1.9%)

14(25.9%)	excellent.
25(46.3%)	good.
10(18.5%)	adequate.
4(7.4%)	poor.

Comment: _____

45. List up to 3 things that inhibit your ability to perform your job effectively. 1(1.9%)

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____

46. Are there any comments you would like to make?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Return the completed survey in the enclosed return envelope by Tuesday, April 30, 1985. If the return envelope is misplaced, forward the survey in the school mail to:

9999, Room 500, SBAB
Marianne Strusinski
Office of Educational Accountability

APPENDIX B

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES CHAIRPERSON SUPPLEMENT

DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES CHAIRPERSON SUPPLEMENT

Please answer the following questions and return the completed form in the enclosed return envelope by Tuesday, April 30, 1985. Do not put your name on the survey. If you have any questions, please call Ms. Marianne Strusinski or Mr. Joe Gomez at 376-1506.

1. Based on your experience as a chairperson, approximately what percentage of your time is spent on chairperson-related activities?

   x = 62.5 %

2. List up to three things that could improve the job of chairperson for Psychological Services:

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

3. List the 5 most important activities which you think you should perform as the area chairperson. For each activity you have listed, designate its present status by marking the appropriate box.

	Being done	NOT being done adequately	NOT being done
1. _____			
2. _____			
3. _____			
4. _____			
5. _____			

4. Is your workspace at the area office adequate?

   1 Yes
   1 No
   2 Partially

   If you did not answer "yes" please explain:

   Need privacy _____

   _____

5. With regard to the evaluations done by Psychological Services, Inc., did you or anyone in your area, spend time reviewing PSI evaluations?

__4__ Yes
____ No

If you responded "yes": approximately how much time was needed to review PSI evaluations?

x = __27.5__ minutes per case/evaluation

Use the following space to make any comments regarding the contract with PSI:

_____

_____

_____

6. Any other comments?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Return the completed survey in the enclosed return envelope by Tuesday, April 30, 1985. If the return envelope is misplaced, forward the survey in the school mail to:

9999, Room 500, SBAB
Marianne Strusinski
Office of Educational Accountability

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL QUESTIONNAIRE

DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY
PRINCIPAL QUESTIONNAIRE

MISSING

As part of the present evaluation of Psychological Services, it is necessary to obtain information from school-level personnel regarding psychological evaluations of students who were referred for possible placement in an exceptional education program. Please respond to this survey or delegate it to the individual who is responsible for overseeing psychological evaluations within your school. Return the completed survey in the enclosed return envelope by Tuesday, April 30, 1985. Do not put your name or your school's name on this survey. If you have any questions, please call Ms. Marianne Strusinski or Mr. Joe Gomez at 376-1506.

AREA: (Please circle)	N	NC	SC	S
N = 244	53(24.1%)	44(20%)	44(20%)	47(21.4%)
n = 220	84.1%	69.8%	74.6%	78.3%

Type of school:

157(71.4%)	Elementary	1(0.5%)
41(18.6%)	Junior High	
20(9.1%)	Senior High	
1(0.5%)	Other: _____	

Position:

65(29.5%)	Principal	20(9.1%)
73(33.2%)	Assistant Principal	
31(14.1%)	Guidance Chairperson	
31(14.1%)	Other: _____	

1. At present, how many students in your school have been referred but not yet tested for a psychological evaluation? (If none, state so.)

   x = 14.14 students

2. For initial, non-priority psychological evaluations, what do you think is the maximum acceptable turnaround time between the referral and the staffing of a student?

   x = 44.67 School days

3. For initial, priority or emergency psychological evaluations, what do you think is the maximum acceptable turnaround time between the referral and the staffing of a student?

   x = 20.78 School days

4. For gifted psychological evaluations, what do you think is the maximum acceptable turnaround time between the referral and the staffing of a student?

   x = 39.6 School days

5. How often does the Exceptional Student Education office request additional information on a student who has been referred?

1(0.5%)	Very frequently (40% or more of the cases)	
13(5.9%)	Frequently (20-40% of the cases)	
43(19.5%)	Sometimes (10-20% of the cases)	1(0.5%)
141(64.5%)	Rarely (10% or less of the cases)	
21(9.5%)	Never	

MISSING

6. List up to three factors that, in your opinion, contribute to the backlog of students waiting for a psychological evaluation.

(1) _____

_____

(2) _____

_____

(3) _____

_____

[37] There is no backlog at my school presently.

7. If you have any suggestions for reducing this backlog, please describe them.

_____

_____

_____

8. In your school, is there an appropriate space available for the school psychologists to test students? Appropriate space is defined as any area that is quiet, has minimal visual stimulation, and is not trafficked by other personnel or students.

164(74.5%)	Yes
25(11.4%)	No
31(14.1%)	Sometimes

If you did not answer "yes", please explain: _____

_____

_____

9. Check those services your school psychologist presently provides.

220	Testing/Evaluating referred students
176	Consulting with individual teachers
30	Providing staff development/inservice to school personnel
89	Providing counseling to students and/or parents
9	Providing workshops to students and/or parents

10. Check all services which you think the school psychologist should provide.

216	Testing/Evaluating referred students
211	Consulting with individual teachers
148	Providing staff development/inservice to school personnel
161	Providing counseling to students and/or parents
101	Providing workshops to students and/or parents

MISSING

11. In your opinion, the quality of the psychological evaluation process is:

		MISSING
66(30.0%)	excellent.	4(1.8%)
86(39.1%)	good.	
45(20.5%)	adequate.	
19(8.6%)	poor.	
-	unable to determine.	

Comment: _____

12. In your opinion, the productivity of the psychological evaluation process is:

37(16.8%)	excellent.	5(2.3%)
76(34.5%)	good.	
50(22.7%)	adequate.	
50(22.7%)	poor.	
2(0.9%)	unable to determine.	

Comment: _____

13. To what extent do you agree with the findings and recommendations in psychological evaluation reports? 2(0.9%)

96(43.6%)	almost all of the time
103(46.8%)	frequently
15(6.8%)	occasionally
2(0.9%)	seldom
1(0.5%)	almost never
1(0.5%)	unable to determine

Comment: _____

14. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Return the completed survey in the enclosed return envelope by Tuesday, April 30, 1985. If the return envelope is misplaced, forward the survey in the school mail to:

9999, Room 500, SBAB
Marianne Strusinski
Office of Educational Accountability

APPENDIX D

TELEPHONE SURVEY OF OTHER MODELS
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
TELEPHONE SURVEY OF OTHER MODELS
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

Good morning. My name is Marianne Strusinski and I'm a program evaluator with Dade County Public Schools here in Miami. I am presently evaluating our psychological evaluation program. One of the goals of this evaluation is to identify procedures that other school systems use in this and comparable programs.

I need approximately 10-15 minutes of your time, would it be possible to discuss this with you now or would you prefer that I call you back at your convenience?

School System: _____

Person contacted: _____

Job Title: _____

Phone number: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

_____

Date contacted: _____

Information current as of: _____

Enrollment: _____

#1 Describe the Psychological evaluation program in your school district.

_____

_____

_____

#2 How Many referrals do you get?

_____

_____

_____

#3 How many evaluations are done?

_____

_____

_____

#4 A. What is the average turnaround time between referral and final report?

_____

_____

_____

B. What is the desirable turnaround time between referral and final report?

_____

_____

_____

#5 What needs improvement in your system?

_____

_____

_____

The School Board of Dade County, Florida adheres to a policy of nondiscrimination in educational programs/activities and employment and strives affirmatively to provide equal opportunity for all as required by:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 - prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended - prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 - prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

Age Discrimination Act of 1967, as amended - prohibits discrimination on the basis of age between 40 and 70.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - prohibits discrimination against the handicapped.

Florida Educational Equity Act - prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, sex, national origin, marital status or handicap against a student or employee.

Veterans are provided re-employment rights in accordance with P.L. 93–508 (Federal) and Section 295.07, Florida Statutes, which also stipulates categorical preferences for employment.